

Sermon for Sunday 12 June 2022 – Trinity Sunday

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May I speak in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Please do be seated. Here we are, Trinity Sunday. That Sunday in the year when many rectors and vicars decide that they're going to invite a visiting preacher, so that they can avoid preaching on the Trinity. And many a preacher, whether they are the incumbent or they are visiting, make the mistake of suddenly trying to turn themselves into the most amazing doctrine tutor going, forget that they're a preacher and usually fail in trying to teach the concept of the Trinity in about ten minutes, using illustrations which on closer examination are usually heretical. So for example, you may have heard the illustration of God, the Trinity, is like water that we know as ice, steam and liquid. That's the heresy of Modalism. Mars Bar, with its various layers - they are all poor illustrations. If you know any of them, forget them, because God the Father is **all** God. God the Son is **all** God, God the Spirit is **all** God.

So I'm going to try and avoid that mistake today of turning myself into a doctrine tutor. And as one of my very wise tutors in college said, if you preach the Trinity in your preaching every week, you don't have to explain it on Trinity Sunday. So my apologies. First of all, if you came here this morning thinking you were going to hear Philip Buckler, and secondly, if you thought you were going to have a doctrine lesson on the Trinity - maybe that's something we'll look at at Think and Drink or a quiet day, but not this morning.

Psalms 8 - maybe my favourite Psalm. In the pewsheet It says, 'O Lord, our Governor', and Lord is in a capital letter and then lowercase letters. I would like to have a word with the people that produce our sheets for us - Lord should be in capital letters. In the Hebrew scriptures it is YHWH, the sacred text of Grammaton. It is the Yahweh; Jehovah; God's name. And then where we have 'Our Governor', should also be 'Our Lord'. But in lowercase - God's job, if you like. 'God, our Sovereign, our Governor, our Lord. How majestic is your name in all the earth, you've set your glory above the heavens'. And so it goes on - verse three: 'When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars that you have established, what are human beings that you are mindful of them, mortals, that you care for them? When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the work of your hands'; some of you will have heard me say before, the language there is of finger crocheting - my grandmother used to call it tatting. Have you heard of that, or is that just a Northern expression? God creating the cosmos is like my grandmother sitting there in her chair just doing finger crocheting. Just think about that for the moment.

And the Psalmist asked, 'This God who is he? Why are you even mindful of man? But it is this creator God that we hear of in Psalm 8, and we heard of in our reading from Proverbs. It's this creator God, who Paul says, 'has justified us by faith in Jesus so that we can have peace with God.' That word 'to be justified' has various meanings, but part is 'being put right'. The way I think of it is, In a close relationship, maybe with my children, that something's gone wrong and that relationship doesn't sit well, and sometimes I have to go and say, 'Look, let's put this right', and then the relationship can be good and peaceful, and God has done that - notice, God has done it; it's nothing that we have done.

So God has justified us by our faith in Jesus, and then poured his love into us by the Holy Spirit. There you go; we've got in the doctrine of the Trinity - the Father who sends the Son; and following his Ascension, the Son and the Father sending the Holy Spirit at Pentecost; the Son, who is in some way limited after the incarnation.

You may remember, I said a couple of weeks ago, the incarnation means that Jesus, the Son of God, became man and remains man - even now; Jesus didn't just borrow a body and give it back. He **became** man and then he sends the Spirit to be - the Greek word is Paraclete; there's no good translation; in fact, one of the translations of our Bible actually just doesn't bother, it just says Paraclete; I think that's a bit of a cop out, but - advocate, one who comes alongside as a guide, one who is a comforter available to everyone, not limited, if you like, as Jesus is by having become human.

And then our short Gospel reading from John 16, which echoes much of what Jesus has been saying in John 14, in the farewell discourse. It's well worth reading John 14, skipping 15, the bulk of which is about 'I am the vine', and landing in John 16 and go, oh, I see, Jesus is sort of repeating this, maybe the disciples didn't get it first time round. But Jesus has been preparing the disciples to face hatred and persecution. As Paul says in his reading, sufferings. But he stops because the disciples can't take anymore. But he promises, when the Holy Spirit comes, that that conversation will continue and go further.

Let me give you an illustration. I spent two years nearly in theological College, and many of you will have spent time, a couple of years, in College, or in apprenticeships, training for future work. And you will know that you can't learn everything that you will need for the future in those short years. And because of that, in my case, I stay in touch with a couple of my tutors, Mike Thompson, who was my pastoral tutor, my Greek tutor, my New Testament tutor. We played rock guitar together, that's another reason we stay in touch; and Chris Pemberton, who some of you will know from Quiet Day a couple of years ago, and he came to preach last year after I was ordained priest. And Chris and Mike are available to me by phone and email, and I can just go 'in College, you said... Can I just check something? Can I explore it further? I thought I understood it when I was in your lecture, but now I'm in parish ministry, it doesn't seem to fit. Can we have a discussion? And some of you may have done the same with your apprentice masters going 'When I was doing this a few years ago... I've forgotten it; or it's not quite working out.'

And in a simple way, this is what Jesus is promising his disciples, and he's promising each of us here in Lavenham today. The Holy Spirit, Jesus promises, will guide us, will guide us into all truth, or maybe better guide you **in** the truth. Note the Holy Spirit guides; the Holy Spirit needs; the Holy Spirit does not control. It always worries me when I hear people praying, 'Lord come and take control'. Now that's not the way it is. Somebody once described the Holy Spirit as the perfect gentleman... guides and leads.

But what is this truth that the Holy Spirit is going to lead us into? We often think of truth as knowledge - but didn't Jesus say he was the truth? Could it be that the work of the Spirit is to guide us to Jesus and guide us in a life following Jesus, to a fuller understanding of what it is to be followers of Jesus; what the

way of **life** looks like, as a follow of Jesus. After all, the early Christians were not called Christians, they were called followers of the way. And the pouring out of the Holy Spirit, which we celebrated last week at Pentecost, speaks of intimate relationship, the relationship between the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit; the relationship we have with Jesus the Son, with God the Father, the intimacy of presence and communication.

But how do we experience that intimacy? Well, like any other relationship - by spending time together, or if separated by distance, by talking on the phone, video calls. That's how we have relationship with our friends, with our family, with people that we are close to. How do we do that as followers of Jesus? Maybe prayerful reading of scripture, asking the Holy Spirit to lead us into truth as we read it. The Holy Spirit will never prompt anything or say anything to us in our prayer life that conflicts with Scripture.

In prayer, having a conversation with God, involving two way communication, listening as well as talking. So much of our prayer, isn't it brothers and sisters, is a shopping list of telling God what the problem is, what we think he should do about it, and who he should report to when he's finished doing it. I'm learning more and more that prayer is more about listening, letting God speak, enjoying God's presence.

But being led into the truth by the Holy spirit is also learning to know the voice of the spirit. And with this, let me close with a couple of examples. My friend Marcus from College, walking through Cambridge by the river. Marcus was someone who spent a lot of time in prayer. If we couldn't find Marcus, we'd usually find him either walking around the quad praying or in the Chapel praying. One day he's walking through Cambridge and he sees somebody just sitting on a bench. And as he recounted it, he said, 'I just heard the voice of the Holy spirit.' So I go and speak to them. Now, that's a bit weird - bench in Cambridge; somebody sitting there; Marcus just goes and sits on the bench - 'Hope you don't mind, I'd like to talk to you. In fact, I'm a follower of Jesus, and I believe that through his Holy Spirit he just told me to ask you a question, which is, "Are you okay?"'

The person broke down in tears. They were sitting on that bench because they were contemplating drowning themselves in the river. Marcus was able to talk to that person, get them some help. It all started because he knew, through spending a lot of time in prayer, he knew what the voice of the Holy spirit sounded like to him and he heard the Spirit say to him, go, sit on the bench and ask that person, 'Are you okay?'

One more recently - yesterday evening, for various reasons, I was ending up locking up the Church last night unexpectedly, and time to go home - it's been a bit of a long day. I heard the Holy Spirit say to me, 'No, leave the doors open, just a few minutes.' A young mother came in with her daughter, just to have a look. It turns out that they recently moved to Lavenham, come in the Church a few times. And I was just able to talk to them about the children's work, and invite them to come when we're doing children's activities, to like the Children's and Families Group on Facebook so they know when it's going on. Something really simple, that wouldn't have happened if I hadn't heard and listened to the voice of the Holy Spirit.

So, brothers and sisters, can I encourage you this morning - enjoy spending time in intimate relationship with God, with the Father, with the Son, through the Holy Spirit. Allow yourselves to be guided into the way of truth, today, this week and beyond. Amen.